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Union League Club
(New York, N.Y.)

Report of the Committee
on National Defense...

New York

1915

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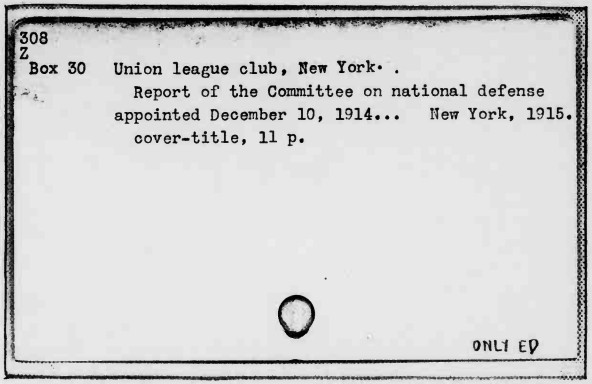
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Report

of the

Committee on National Defense

Appointed December 10, 1914

by

THE UNION LEAGUE CLUB

OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

THE UNION LEAGUE CLUB
OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK
1915

REPORT
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON NATIONAL DEFENSE
APPOINTED DECEMBER 10, 1914
BY
THE UNION LEAGUE CLUB OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

The subject your Committee has to deal with may be divided into three parts:

1st. How do we stand at present in the matter of capacity for defense against aggression from the outside?

2d. What reason is there to suppose that we need better preparedness?

3d. By what principle of action is this desired preparedness best obtainable?

Before discussing these points it is well to call attention to the time factor as a vital element in national defense.

The two principal branches of this latter are the Navy and Army, or the land forces.

It would be physically impossible to rapidly increase the Navy. It has been estimated in one of the official Washington publications that it would take five years to put the present Navy in order, certainly fully that to increase and equip a larger Navy; but we need defense immediately, and if it cannot be secured by increasing the Navy it must be done by means of sufficient land forces.

Your Committee expects to show before closing, by an example, how a thorough system of defense on land can be rapidly provided.

For this reason your Committee has devoted most of its attention to the question of the Army.

Concerning the first of above three questions, your Committee regrets to report that, so far as it has been able to learn since its report on January 9th last, there has been no efficient action taken by the Government to remedy the then prevailing practically defenseless state of the country.

Regarding the second question, your Committee believes that the action of Japan towards China during the past twelve months is worth considering. In this case a nation of some 52,000,000 people ready in all particulars for war forced its will upon a neighboring state controlling several hundred millions of population, who were unprepared for any defensive or offensive action of moment.

The action of Germany at the commencement of the present European war is ample notice to all concerned that treaties are of no value for preventing unprovoked aggression on those unprepared to defend

themselves. The choice of Belgium by Germany as a highway for the invasion of France is a case in point. Here a nation of some 6,000,000 or 7,000,000 people with an inefficient Army of 150,000 or 200,000 men was overrun although, all things considered, an equally easy route lay through a portion of Switzerland where the population was, if anything, favorably inclined to the invader and much smaller in number than in Belgium. They however were amply prepared to defend themselves with a much larger and more efficient Army than Belgium had. This seems to your Committee plain and practical evidence that those prepared to defend themselves are less likely to suffer aggression than those who are unprepared. We are distinctly of the latter class.

That our ocean boundaries are not insuperable defense may be deduced from the following:

Your Committee has been reliably informed, that at the time the European war broke out one of the nations of Europe, whose fleet and army were more powerful than ours, would have been able to secure control of the seas, certainly within two months and probably within a month of the sailing of this fleet. Within two or three weeks after securing control of the seas 400,000 to 500,000 men fully prepared and equipped for a campaign could have landed almost anywhere on our eastern coast; and within eight weeks thereafter, had it been desired, 1,000,000 men more.

No one can say that such a thought may not have been in the minds of at least some of the German military powers, because in 1901 a certain Von Edelsheim, an officer in the German General Staff, published a book detailing how, where and with what speed troops might be embarked at the various German ports in the Baltic and the North Sea. At that time England was apparently in view; but the underlying plan was suitable to any overseas venture and was considered by him specifically in its possible application to the United States. He states in this connection that between our country and Germany political friction had not been lacking, although removed so far chiefly through acquiesence on the part of Germany, but that a policy of submission could not but be limited and that the German fleet would be useful in order to combat the encroachment of the United States upon their interests. Furthermore that the German fleet had every prospect of victoriously defeating the forces of the United States and thereby forcing the Federal Government to treat for peace.

He details the numbers of the Regular Army, their distribution and comments on the militia, their lack of training and their equipment with inferior rifles. He adds that the weakness and inexperience of the Regulars would essentially facilitate a quick invasion.

Whatever differences of opinion may exist concerning the value to be attached to such remarks, it is plain that Von Edelsheim was confident that Germany could successfully defeat this country; and it is probable that in his opinion he was not alone amongst the officers of the German General Staff.

In the case of the United States such a campaign would probably be directed against the country north of Norfolk and east of the Alleghanies, as an initial move.

Referring to only two of our industries which are absolutely necessary for the carrying on of a war,—the manufacture of ammunition and of shoes,—an invading Army of that sort could capture by far the larger portion of our capacity in those lines within an exceedingly small area in New England and so leave us at least very much hampered in the conduct of our defense. That no such attack has yet been attempted is almost certainly due to the fact than any such adventure would have greatly disturbed the European balance of power, thereby exposing the aggressors to serious danger nearer home.

The important question of the three is the last one, namely: What is the principle which should underlie a state of efficient preparedness in our country?

Your Committee submits the following tabulation of expense under the law 1914-1915 taken from the latest Government reports available.

Army	$101,019,000	
Fortifications	5,628,000	
Military Academy	998,000	
Navy		$144,869,000
Fortifications, etc.	600,000	
Navy [redacted]		38,350,000
	$108,245,000	$183,219,000

Recapitulating as a total of all army services, pensions included:

Army and fortifications	$108,245,000
Navy	183,219,000
Pensions	169,150,000
	$460,614,000
Total appropriations of all kinds, 1914-15	$1,116,118,000

Besides this, $21,824,000 were appropriated for fortifications at Panama. Whether above sums include the $6,000,000 more or less allotted to the militia of the various states is not clear.

We gather therefrom that the total expenses of Government amounted to $1,116,118,000 and that of this total $460,614,000, or 41.3 per cent., were consumed in the service rendered by the Army, the Navy and in pensions, which latter, in the sum of $169,150,000 for the year, represent payments to those who served the country in former wars and to their dependents. This latter amount is largely due to our national habit of unpreparedness.

The Chief of Staff at Washington stated in his annual report for 1914 that we had an Army of 93,016 men, also in the neighborhood of 120,000 militia. The latter are devoid of any military duties or obligations towards our Federal Government except that they may

enlist as volunteers in case of war. The efficiency of this service is set forth in your Commitee's printed report of January 9, 1915, where quotations from departmental reports of the Washington Government are given. The militia costs the General Government in the neighborhood of $6,000,000 per year, for which it has the right to prescribe certain courses of training but apparently no right to see to it that this training is properly carried out.

The Regular Army, amounting to 93,016 men, and including fortifications and equipment, insufficient as these last two are, was to cost the country under the law of 1914-1915 some $108,245,000. That is, in round numbers, over $1150 per man for the one year. Were the armament and equipment sufficient even for the small Army we have, the expense would have been materially larger. As a contrast we may state that in 1912 their army cost the Swiss people $16.77 per man.

Omitting as too uncertain any estimate of forces necessary to care for feints, on the part of an enemy, to land troops, forces which would have to be very considerable, it may be assumed, for sake of the argument, that an Army of at least 500,000 men promptly available and with sufficient training and equipment is the minimum required to present a defensive front to any aggressor who can promptly land 400,000 men or more. The question then immediately arises, can the country stand the expenditure, assuming the present rate to be necessary? It would mean for the Army alone, and not including the Navy, some $550,000,000 to $600,000,000 a year; but irrespective of the country's ability to provide such an annual expenditure your Committee is informed by competent authority that it is not possible to secure such an Army by the present system of voluntary enlistment, even if it were desired, because for some years past it has been clear to those in position to know that the maximum possible volunteer Army under present conditions of enlistment, training and pay is not over 140,000 men.

Your Commitee, however, considers that an Army of 500,000 is not sufficient to safeguard the country. We have both an eastern and a western flank to defend and possibly feints at landing troops. Should such a European nation as above discussed be able to secure the cooperation of an Asiatic power like Japan, with its 50,000,000 people, half as many as the United States claims, we should undoubtedly be attacked on both flanks at once. An Army of 500,000 would not even be enough to meet the eastern invasion and no one will pretend that within the two months, which might be the time necessary for an Asiatic power like Japan to place her troops on the Pacific coast, it would be possible to train, equip and place in line to resist a western invasion an Army sufficient to cope therewith. We should need, to be safe, a further 500,000 or 1,000,000 men.

Your Committee in considering what to advise has given thought to the principles underlying the action of the various nations in this matter.

They can recognize only two,—voluntary enlistment, as it prevails in Great Britain, her colonies and the United States, and the principle that every citizen of a country owes military duty in one form or another to the country of his allegiance.

The former principle has brought an immense strain on England during the present conflict both in loss of life in an insufficient expeditionary force and also because of loss of time and great expense; and had it not been for her Allies on the continent she would in all probability have been completely overwhelmed within six months.

The latter principle is enforced in a general sense in two different ways,—a general conscription of all men as soon as they attain to military age for a considerable period of time, with subsequent obligations to obey any call to the colors until the individual is well on in later middle life. This evolves standing armies of the character of those in Germany, France, Russia, etc. The second plan predicates an enrollment for a comparatively brief period and then the practical release of the men for the remaining years of life. The former is the policy in all of the nations of Europe with the exception of Switzerland.

In Switzerland however and in the British Colonies of Australia and of New Zealand manhood service is practiced in such a manner as to interfere but slightly with the civil occupations of the individual, the greatest interference being during the first year of service and with the youngest class of men who are usually free from dependents; but the period of liability to service is spread over a longer number of years and the men are held to short annual or biennial periods of training until early middle life.

After duly considering these various systems, your Committee feels that general conscription in this country similar to that practiced by most of the large nations in Europe would be unwise and unnecessary; but it is firmly convinced that every able-bodied man should be held to military service in one form or other, according to his physical capacity or his earning power. This is no new doctrine for the United States but finds its plain justification not alone in our Federal Constitution, which gives Congress the right to raise and maintain armies without limitations of the manner in which it be accomplished, but as well in the Constitution of your own State of New York. In other words, those fit for physical service should be held thereto and those not beholden to such service should supply the necessary funds for the expenditures incidental to such military defense, both classes giving their time to the purpose of military preparedness, the one by his personal service free of compensation, the other by a payment of money earned during the time he would, if physically able, have been obliged to serve and which would be devoted solely to maintaining the services of the Army and Navy.

Believing that most of us are but ill acquainted with the small amount of disturbance such a plan may cause in the civil occupations of the individual, we desire to put on record as an example an outline

of the Swiss conditions, they having proven satisfactory in practice, and to demonstrate how such a plan reasonably modified would affect our own people.

In Switzerland the military law of 1907 which is to-day in force opens with the statement that

"Every Swiss owes his country military service. The military responsibilities comprise:

"Personal service—military service properly so-called.

"The payment of an exemption tax—a military tax."

Switzerland has something like 3,500,000 people and has to-day an Army of 470,000 men fully armed, equipped and drilled; and efficient in all military work. They obtain this force under the following provisions:

All men physically fit are drafted into the service after a preliminary inspection at the age of 19 and according to the branch of the service to which they are allotted they serve 60 to 90 days during the first year. Until the age of 32 they are beholden and may be annually called to the colors for a period of 11 to 14 days. In practice they are not called annually but more nearly every other year. Between the ages of 32 and 40 they are only called for a very few days every two or three years; and between the ages of 40 and 48 they are relieved from active duty but are liable to be called out for police and defense duties as a last contingent in case of serious invasion of the country.

This training is supplemented by the obligation to make annually a certain specified record at target practice with the rifle under Government supervision in the district in which each man resides. The result is a well trained, efficient and hardy set of men.

The organization to-day is so effective that on the declaration of war between Germany and France in 1914 many tens of thousands of men were on the frontier within two or three days time.

If we apply this principle to the United States we would have an Army of most unreasonable size, totally out of proportion to any needs which might arise. Such an Army can be cut down to proper dimensions by reducing the period of military service, but assuming that we need trained men to the number of 2,000,000 to furnish first line troops on both fronts and sufficient reserves to replace casualties, then the following argument holds good.

850,000 men each year attain the age of 21 in the United States. Assuming that for one reason or another but 400,000 men were found physically fit each year and that they, on the Swiss plan, did 90 days service and in the following years 11 days per annum, the country would each year secure 400,000 men with 90 days training; and at the end of six years would have 2,000,000 who had all been through the 90 days training and with the colors 11 days per annum for between one and five years. Besides that we would have in training the new class of annual recruits amounting to 400,000 men.

Should this training be evenly distributed throughout the year it would give employment and experience to a large corps of officers all the year round and there would be at the end of six years 170,000 men undergoing the various stages of training at all times.

On the other hand those who were not drafted to the colors and those who had been permanently released from service after completing their training would be called upon to pay the actual expenses necessary for the service as an offset against their freedom from personal obligation to serve without pay; these payments to go exclusively to the maintenance of armed forces of the country.

If the men are drafted at 19 as in Switzerland they would be free from all military obligation at 25 and yet we would have an Army sufficiently numerous and trained to be effective. It would be entirely under Federal control and could be used nowhere outside of the United States or such areas as Congress might provide and should further reserves be deemed necessary, the extension of training for 1, 2 and 3 years more would amply provide for any such increase.

Your Committee does not offer these suggestions except as a practical example of how matters might work out under a system already recognized as efficient; but they do believe that the majority of our citizens have no realization of how little effort is necessary, how little expenditure of time and how small a disturbance to civil life, in order to secure what is absolutely necessary,—namely, efficient national defense.

Concerning the Navy, our information is less complete than concerning the Army.

For instance, we have been unable to ascertain whether many of the idle ships are lacking in crews because it is not possible to secure sufficient enlistments. We are, however, told that there has been more activity in naval matters. Such usually spells improvement; but Assistant Secretary Roosevelt on October 12th this year still states that we are 18,000 men short of the number necessary to man the fleet properly. It is stated currently that the fleet which manœuvred off Boston a short time since was much undermanned and Admiral Fletcher stated in a letter to the Committee on Naval Affairs that in his battleship fleet,—that is the Atlantic Fleet,—of 21 ships he was over 5000 men short for the battleships alone.

During the "Day Individual Practice" last spring the maximum range was 9000 yards, it being estimated that this was the equivalent of 13,000 yards on the reduced charge used. This is "battle practice" and yet even at the maximum range of 13,000 yards the practice falls far short of the 21,000 yard range of modern guns abroad.

In this same spring practice the percentage of hits this year was 11¼ per cent. The British percentage was over 50 per cent. for its 12-inch guns in the year before the war and for the 13.5-inch guns 66.7 per cent. It would appear that no reasonable difference in conditions could justify such a disparity of results.

Your Committee cites these items solely as justifying further inquiry concerning the quality and efficiency of the Navy and would recommend this whole question for further investigation and report to the Club; but we wish to add that the General Board of the Navy as set forth in our previous report, years ago enunciated at least a comprehensive and definite policy for the upbuilding of the service, which has, however, been largely neglected by Congress.

We wish to ask the Club this evening to endorse the above mentioned principle of general manhood service which, as above stated, Congress has the constitutional right to enforce and which has always prevailed in this country until during the last few decades of prosperity it has been forgotten.

Your Committee offers the following resolution for your consideration:

WHEREAS: The unpreparedness both of our Army and of our Navy for defense of our country has recently become increasingly apparent and constitutes a serious danger to the life of the nation, and the futility of treaties and international agreements for the protection of the rights of neutrals both on sea and land has in recent times been clearly demonstrated by the actions of some of the nations now at war;

WHEREAS FURTHERMORE: The Administration program as recently set forth proposing an expenditure of $500,000,000 for naval construction, but making no satisfactory provision for manning, to the full, of ships already in service, at present laid up, or still to be built; and for the Army providing a standing force of 140,000 men and a volunteer "Continental Army" of 600,000 men, is patently insufficient to meet the possibilities of our exposed situation, involving as they do the feasability of attack on two fronts by two or more of the nations most efficient in modern warfare;

WHEREAS ALSO: The cost of any sufficient force on the present or recently proposed basis of enlistment and pay would be prohibitive and tend to the financial exhaustion of the country, even could a satisfactory number of recruits be secured,

AND WHEREAS: Universal manhood service finds its justification in the Federal Constitution, and in that of our own State of New York;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: That this Club in meeting here assembled endorses

1. The principle of universal military service by the entire manhood of the country; either personal service with the colors on the part of those physically fit, as provided for both in the Federal Constitution and in the Constitution of the State of New York, or else by financial contributions from those unable to serve in person, to be applicable solely to the military and naval services of the country.

2. The immediate application of this principle at the present time to the military and naval services of the United States which are destined for the defense of the states and territories.

3. As a minimum the policy of the General Board of the Navy as set forth on pages 31 and 32 of the annual report of the Navy Department for 1913 calling for a fleet of 48 ships of the first line in 1920 together with the men and equipment and attendant smaller units necessary.

AND FURTHERMORE BE IT RESOLVED: That this Club now pledges itself to lend its full support and aid to the carrying out of these principles and plans.

Your Committee moves the adoption of above preambles and resolution.

Respectfully submitted,

C. R. CORNING, *Chairman,*
THOMAS DIMOND
HARRISON K. BIRD,
Committee.

New York, N. Y.
November 11, 1915.

[NOTE: The foregoing resolutions were unanimously adopted by The Union League Club of New York at its regular monthly meeting held November 11, 1915. Henry C. Quinby, Secretary.]

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